

Quad-City Times

3-17-10

By Ed Tibbetts

The U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill Wednesday that would require federal agencies to use "plain writing" in many of the the documents they send to the public.

U.S. Rep. Bruce Braley, D-Iowa, sponsored the measure.

The House approved the bill, 386-33.

The Senate still must act.

This is the second time a Braley-sponsored plain language act has been passed by the House.

A similar bill was approved in 2008, but it died in the Senate.

"There is no reason why the federal government can't write these forms and other public documents in a way we can all understand," Braley said.

He said the requirement will save money in the private sector and increase accountability.

Getting federal agencies to talk more plainly has been a goal for years.

Former presidents Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton each issued executive orders requiring agencies to make documents easier for the public to understand.

However, those efforts have waned over the years.

The new proposal excludes federal regulations from the plain language requirement, but it will apply to documents that are most likely to reach the public.

Those include documents explaining Social Security and Medicare benefits, as well as Internal Revenue Service forms and instructions.

Braley originally proposed that the bill include all government documents sent to the public except for regulations. However, the bill was amended in committee to narrow the scope.